

Public Employee Rights in the Political Process



PERMITTED ACTIVITY

Just because you are a City employee doesn't mean that you give up your rights to participate in the political process. City employees, while on their own time, may:

- Vote
- Express personal opinions on campaign issues
- Contribute to campaigns
- Volunteer for or manage campaigns
- Run for or hold political office

These rights, however, may be restricted while at work, when representing the City, and in some rare instances when in conflict with an employee's official duties.

Both state and city law limit the use of City facilities and resources for political purposes. The City's Ethics Code also prohibits City employees from using their City position for private benefit, and prohibits them from using City funds and facilities for a non-City purpose.

It is important to remember that, absent any conflict with official duties, **city employees may not be treated differently because of their political activity outside the workplace.**

PROHIBITED ACTIVITY

The City's Elections Code has recently been amended to mirror some state law provisions. City law now provides that:

- A Seattle City official, candidate or someone representing a candidate or official may not knowingly solicit campaign contributions from any Seattle City employee.
- A manager or supervisor cannot solicit campaign contributions from anyone in his or her chain of command.
- A city official, candidate or their representative may not ask a city employee to be on a mailing list, if the mailing list will be used to solicit campaign contributions.
- A city official, candidate or their representative may not target city employees in any mass solicitation of campaign contributions.

In addition:

- A civil service city employee may not be disciplined for contributing or not contributing to a political campaign.
- A civil service city employee's conditions of employment cannot be changed based upon whether the employee has or has not made a political contribution.
- Whether or not an applicant for city employment has contributed or not contributed to a political campaign cannot be used in any hiring decision for a civil service position.

City employees also may not:

➤ **Use or allow others to use City facilities and equipment**, including the following, to assist a candidate or to support or oppose a ballot measure:

- office equipment, including:
 - phone, cell phone
 - computer
 - photocopier
 - fax machine
 - pager
- stationery, postage
- employees
- public office space, property
- vehicle
- tools
- publications of the agency
- clientele lists of persons served by the agency.

Political materials, including the following, may not be displayed on City bulletin boards, public walls or windows of City work areas, public grounds, or City vehicles:

- signs
- bumper stickers
- invitations to fund-raisers
- position papers

➤ **Solicit campaign funds** on City property.

➤ **Do campaign work (volunteer or paid) on City paid time**, except vacation and holidays.

Be especially alert to conversations that start out as City business and gradually transition into campaigning. When that happens, stop the conversation and continue it when you are not on City time and not using City resources.

➤ **Use their positions** to endorse or oppose a candidate or ballot issue.

Exception: Elected officials may be listed with their office title on campaign literature or in the voters' pamphlet as an endorser or a member of a campaign committee.

NOTE: City employees who express an opinion about a ballot proposition or candidate may use their titles so long as they make it clear that they are expressing their own views and not the views of the City.

➤ **Wear campaign buttons** or clothing while in a public contact job.

Departments may require employees who are otherwise visible to the public or who are in positions of implied authority not to wear campaign buttons or clothing while on the job.

For Authority Please See RCW 41.06.250; RCW 42.17A.555; SMC 4.16.070(a)(2); and SMC 2.04.300.

Call the SEEC at 684-8500 for more information.